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ABSTRACT

The mass media appear to have an influential role in the socialization of children by exposing them to a world far beyond the limits of their immediate experience. Because children must depend on mass media models for learning about adult sexual intimacy, a content analysis of daytime soap operas, to which many children are exposed daily without reruns or summer replacements, was undertaken. In 1976 and 1979 two episodes of each major network's soap operas were videotaped for analysis, and intimate acts or references were coded by level of intimacy from verbal reference to petting to implied intercourse. According to the analysis, unmarried people were portrayed as being more sexually active than married people. Of the intimate sexual behaviors engaged in by married people, petting was more evident than talk about intercourse. The rate of occurrence of intimate acts remained rather constant between 1976 and 1979, with only a slight increase in the 1979 season. Many of the sex acts were not explicitly portrayed: they were discussed, alluded to, or implied. Given the theory that children will come to value and model the behaviors seen on television, the findings suggest that those acts most explicitly portrayed, specifically petting, would be modeled more frequently than other intimate acts. (HTH)

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AFTERNOON DELIGHT: SEX IN THE SOAPS

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Childhood is a period of information acquisition and processing during which children learn what to expect from their environment and what their environment expects from them. The years between infancy and adulthood witness the formation and elaboration of a conception of reality, both physical and social, within which the child and later the adult will function. Comstock and Lindsey (1975) suggest that childhood is a period of "role socialization" where children learn the beliefs, values, attitudes, and kinds of behaviors expected from them for particular social situations.

Much of the information necessary for role socialization is mediated by others. During the pre-school to early school years, children can be expected to define reality in terms of the prevailing rules and norms embraced by their parents (Roberts, 1973). Subsequently, children derive information about their environment from multiple sources, both social and nonsocial. In our society, the mass media appear to have a potential for playing an influential role in the lives of children. The mass media are pervasive, accessible, and attended to by children of all ages (Greenberg, 1974). The mass media, especially the visual media to which children have access very early, expose them to the world far beyond the limits of their immediate experience. With the young viewer's increasing belief in the realism of television content (Meyer, 1973; Reeves, 1974; Greenberg and Reeves, 1976; Donohue and Donohue, 1977) and the high level of use of television for purposes of social learning (Greenberg, 1974; Greenberg and Reeves, 1976), the child is particularly prone to learning from such content. According to Greenberg and Reeves (1976:87) the most general sequential expectation about the likely impact of the perceived reality of television for children is: "To the extent that television content is the sole or principal source of information for a child on a particular

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issue or social situation, that information is likely to be judged by the child as realistic and will be accepted. To the extent that television content is perceived to be real-to-life, the child's attitudes and behaviors are more likely to be consistent with the content of that exposure." The content on network television, then, can play a major role in influencing children's perceptions of the world and their role within it.

Of all the concerns voiced about television's content over its thirty-year span, one of the most long-standing criticisms has been that it contains too much violence. Over the past few years, public pressures supported by scientific research (McLeod, Atkin and Chaffee, 1972; Lefkowitz, et al., 1972) sponsored by the Surgeon General's research program built up sufficient strength to cause the networks to decrease, in part, the amount and explicitness of violence during the 1977 season (Gerbner, et al., 1978)[1]. However, it has recently been alleged that the networks are replacing violence with sex (Fernandez-Collado, et al., 1978; Silverman, et al., 1979). As a result, sex on network television has become an increasing concern of the social critics. It is a complaint now identified in national surveys of television viewers, equaling or exceeding audience concern about violence (Johnson and Satow, 1978). Bandura and Walters (1963) have asserted that American children are afforded little opportunity to observe actual adult sexual behavior because the norms of privacy prohibit the direct viewing of all but the most peripheral forms of sexual exchange. Schramm and Roberts (1971) note that, since sexual intimacy qualifies as a content area of quite limited personal experience for the young viewer, children are forced into greater dependence on mass media models and that there may be a strong potential for learning about sexual intimacy from such content.

[1] Despite the continued efforts of social critics and pressure groups and regardless of the networks' declarations and assurances of further reductions, Gerbner, et al., (1979) reported an overall increase in violent content for the 1978-1979 season.

But what types and with what frequency do mass media models of sexual intimacy portray these behaviors? While the examination of sexual content on television is a relatively recent concern, there exists at least five published reports of televised portrayals of sexual intimacy on prime-time television. In the first published work in this area, Franzblau, Sprafkin, and Rubinstein (1977) analyzed 50 hours of programming from the 1975-1976 season. They discovered that more physically intimate behaviors occur in the 8-9 p.m. time period than later in the evening and that the most frequent behaviors were kissing, embracing, and non-aggressive touching. There were no identified acts of homosexuality and only two acts of implied or explicit heterosexual intercourse. Abel and Fontes (1976) also determined that there were more sex acts before 9 p.m. than afterwards.

In contrast, Fernandez-Collado, et al. (1978) found that, in a sample of 58 hours of programming from the 1976 season, more than twice as many acts occurred from 9-11 p.m. as from 8-9 p.m. In addition, they found that the most frequent act implied was sexual intercourse between unmarried partners and that acts of prostitution was a dominant subject matter. The inconsistencies between these studies prompted an investigation by Greenberg, et al, (1978) in which two seasons of prime-time television programming were compared. With a sample of 48.5 hours of programming from the 1977 season and 56 hours of programming from the 1978 season, Greenberg, et al. reported results that coincided with the Fernandez-Collado, et al. findings that the portrayal of sexual intimacy occurs more frequently after 9 p.m. and that the most prevalent sexual references were to intercourse among non-married partners.

With a sample of sixty-four programs, representative of the prime-time 1977-1978 season, Silverman, Sprafkin, and Rubinstein (1979) also found that there were less intimate sexual behaviors from 8-9 p.m. as from 9-11 p.m.

Of the behaviors coded, physical or verbal allusions to discouraged sexual contacts (i.e., homosexuality, incest, prostitution) occurred five times as frequently from 9-11 p.m. as from 8-9 p.m. Similarly, physical or verbal portrayals of discouraged modes of gratification (i.e., exhibitionism, voyeurism, transvestism/transexualism) occurred twice as often in the later viewing hours than during the 8-9 p.m. time period. In comparing their findings to those of Franzblau, et al. (1977), Silverman, et al. noted that sexual innuendos increased more than five-fold from the earlier analysis and that references to sexual intercourse appeared fifteen times as often in the 1977 season than in the 1975 season.

Despite these recent efforts to examine the sexual content on network television, little research has been done that examines such content during the morning and afternoon hours of programming. Clearly, there are some types of programming that are especially geared for children and do not afford this examination; these include morning cartoons, educational programs like Captain Kangaroo, and game shows. These types of programs do not present scenes of intimacy between people. However, since the earliest days of network television, the viewers have been offered an uninterrupted and growing supply of daytime soap opera serials. Every weekday, from the late morning to the late afternoon on every network, the soap operas are presented without reruns or summer replacements. According to Katzman (1972), these descendants of the popular radio serials have been reaching a larger audience every year; an audience ranging from five to ten million people daily with some programs reaching 10 percent of all households with television, a rating as high as the highest rated prime-time program. This audience is generally composed of 71 percent women, primarily married and with a family. The remainder of the audience is composed of pre-school children and

unemployed/retired men. Since the soap opera serials run from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (1979 season) a potentially accessible audience may be the school age children.

In Katzman's content analysis of soap operas, he notes that the predominant problem and theme in these daily serials involves romantic and marital affairs between the soap opera characters. Although Katzman did not measure the level of explictness of these problems, or account for the marital and romantic activities or incidents of sexual intimacy that were not considered problems, the fact that they are a prevalent theme in as many as 14 daily programs should be of some concern to the social critics and social scientists. Given the popular viewership of these programs and the composition of their audience, soap operas are potentially a major force in the transmission of values, life styles and sexual information to children in the country. It is certainly a worthy endeavor to analyze, specifically, the type and frequency of sexual intimacy on television's soap opera serials and examine the acts of intimacy that are presented in the afternoon. Obtaining such information is necessary if valid assessments are to be made of the effects of viewing sexual intimacy on television.

METHODS

In the winter, 1976, and summer, 1979, two episodes of each network's soap opera serials were videotaped for analysis[2]. The former contained 12 programs and 15½ hours of television and the later contained 13 programs and 21 hours of television. The distribution of episodes and hours of television by network, time period, and program length are in Table 1.

Intimate sexual behavior was defined as each explicit, insinuated, or endorsed act of sexual intercourse, any type of illicit sexual behavior, or homosexuality. It included these sub-acts and references to them:

Rape, homosexual or heterosexual: A forced act of intercourse, usually accompanied by assult or threat.

examples:
1. A man forces another man to have intercourse.
2. A woman forces a man to have intercourse.
3. A woman confesses that she can only have intercourse and enjoy it when a stranger forces her.
4. A young girl's rape is discussed between two doctors.

Homosexual acts: Sex acts, other than rape, between persons of the same sex, e.g., intercourse and references to homosexual relationships and behaviors.

examples:
1. A woman kisses another woman on the mouth.
2. Two men caress each other passionately.
3. There is the insinuation of two men having a homosexual relationship.
4. Two neighbors discuss the homosexual living next door.

Intercourse between unmarried partners: Only heterosexual acts of intercourse, implied or explicit, between two or more unmarried people.

examples:
1. A college girl and her boyfriend have intercourse.
2. A secretary has intercourse with her boss, who is married.
3. A barber and customer discuss how young people are having sex without being married and not worrying about the consequences.
4. A young man asks his blind date if she enjoys intercourse.

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[2]Two programs from the 1976 season, "All My Children" and "One Life To Live" were not available for coding.

Intercourse between married partners: Each instance of implied or explicit intercourse between spouses.

examples:
1. A wife and her husband go upstairs to make love.
2. The husband rolls over in bed and notes how good his wife was last night; how it tired him our.
3. A husband asks his wife if she would like to have sex.
4. A woman is discussing her and her husband's sex life together with her neighbor.

Prostitution: Any portrayal of pimps, solicitation, and the selling and buying of sex.

examples:
1. A father tells his daughter to get an education so as not to end up a hooker like her mother.
2. A man tells his friend he is a pimp and that he couldn't live in any other way.
3. A woman prostitute approaches a car to offer her sexual services to a man in it.
4. A woman discusses her past and the years of standing on a street corner earning money the hard way-- with her body.

Petting: Sexually stimulating behavior more intense than kissing, touching, and simple hugging, but not including sexual relations.

examples:
1. A man is surrounded by several women who are pawing at his body.
2. A young boy and girl are lying on a couch in a passionate embrace, kissing and holding each other and saying how good they feel.
3. A woman flashbacks to the time when she and her ex-husband kissed passionately on the sands of the Florida beaches.
4. While in bed, the wife rubs and kisses her husband's chest.

Other intimate sexual behaviors: Any other sexual behaviors considered illegal or intimate sex acts that do not clearly fit the other definitions.

examples:
1. A man asks a woman if she would like to go to his tent to "fool around in the sack."
2. A bartender asks a customer if he is looking for a little action with the ladies.
3. A mother notes that her daughter is a child/woman, mature physically but virginal and an easy mark for someone to take advantage of her youth and her body.
4. A boy looks at his girlfriend and says how it's amazing that she has remained pure after all the men that she has been with.

Intimate sex acts and references are behaviors, physical or verbal, which may consist of a single utterance and/or action or several comments and/or series of actions. For a verbal reference to be coded, the statement need not be received by the target. Each act/reference ends when the agent or target of the transaction changes or if the act/reference is interrupted by the introduction of a new character or scene.

In addition to analyzing the incidence of these content categories, program length, starting time, and network were also compared. The level of explicitness of each behavior was examined and rated as high, low, or not at all explicit in its physical and verbal portrayal. A demographic analysis of the agents and targets of intimate acts and references was performed. Gender, race, age, occupation, and marital status comparisons were made. An examination of the relationship between the individuals who were performing or referred to as having performed an act of sexual intimacy was also conducted. These individuals were identified as engaged/plan to marry, married, blood relatives, working together, strangers and/or lovers.

Coding was done by two undergraduate, female coders and this researcher and conducted during the months of July and August, 1979. Coder training entailed about 35 hours of discussion and practice coding. The first step in the training was to discuss the conceptualization of the variable "intimate sexual behavior." Next, each type of sexual behavior was individually introduced, as were the different circumstances in which these behaviors might appear. Practice coding than began with tapes of pre-selected soap opera serials that contained these behaviors. Each time the behavior under discussion was thought to be elicited, the coders and researcher discussed the behavior and

examined its characteristics. After each behavior was conceptually examined and identified within the context of an actual soap opera serial, randomly selected pre-recorded soap opera programs were practice coded independently. Discussion took place to determine if there were any discrepancies among the coders and between the coders and this researcher. When all coders understood and agreed on the meaning and criteria of the behavior, a new content variable was introduced and the same process was repeated. Once all the variables were studied and discussed, there was practice coding for the full set of variables. Problems or disagreements identified now were dealt with by discussion until there was consensual agreement. Episodes were then randomly drawn from our sample programs and coded in the order of their selection.

During the actual coding of the sample programs, the two coders worked together while this researcher coded independently. Reliability checks between the two coders, between each coder and this researcher, and between the two-coder team and this researcher were performed after every fifth episode was coded. This was done in the hopes of controlling for sex differences between the two female coders and this researcher. The checks provided 10 seperate reliability estimates for the intimate sex variable and 4 reliability estimate for level of verbal explicitness, level of physical explicitness, age, occupation, marital status, type of interaction, and relationship, all of which exceeded a .85 percentage of agreement.

When all the formal coding was completed, it was noted that 27 instances of petting resulted from two independent episodes of different programs from the 1976 season. These behaviors were presented in flashback sequences. Although each act of petting was interrupted by a quick flash of the present, therefore qualifying each instance of flashback to be coded as a seperate act

of petting, these behaviors were so brief and in such rapid succession that each entire flashback sequence was post-coded as a single instance of petting so as not to distort the data.

After coding, all data were punched for computer analysis and all computer cards were varified to ensure coding and key punching accuracy. Data analysis was done on Michigan State University's CDC 6500 computer using the existing system of computer programs in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the types of intimate acts and references as well as the frequency of their occurrence in the 1976 and 1979 seasons. A total of 31 acts/references occurred in 1976 and 48 acts/references occurred in 1979. Petting is clearly the intimate behavior which occurred most frequently in both years with coders isolating 11 acts/references in 1976 and 34 acts/references in 1979. This accounts for 35 percent of all coded behaviors in 1976 and 70 percent in 1979. In 1976, these 11 petting acts/references were coded as follows:

(1) Two married people are in their apartment exchanging the wedding rings they always wanted but couldn't afford. They kiss each other affectionately as they place the rings on each others fingers. The affection turns into passionate kissing and hugging.

(2) Mick and Mrs. Horton come into the house after a snowball fight. Mick still has a snowball and threatens Mrs. Horton to give him anything he wants or she will get hit with the snow. The two start kissing passionately.

(3) Greg, his wife Amanda, and friend Laura are discussing Latin men. Laura notes how wonderful they are as she wraps her arms around Greg. They kiss passionately, although the scene is rather light-hearted.

(4) Jeff is in the hospital, unconscious. Heather, his lover, is carrying his child and is having a daydream about Jeff. In the dream they exchange a long, hard kiss.

(5) Cal comes home from work and Meg greets him with a hefty kiss and tight hug. She tells him that "this is because I love you."

(6) Steve is at work tending bar when Lisa comes in. They engage in a rather long kiss over the bar.

(7) Karen is kneeling at Steve's bedside. He tells her he loves her as she fondles his arm.

(8) Karen and Stenve are discussion their future together and they engage in kissing and hugging.

(9) Preston is working at home and Lori is trying to get his attention. She turns on a record and sings. He responds by putting down his work, invites her on a business trip and passionately kisses her.

(10) While Julie is talking about how Trisha was receiving obscene notes, David has flashbacks of he and Trisha naked in bed, kissing and touching with wild abandon. There are 6 of these quick flashbacks.

(11) Mrs. Chancellor is holding the child that her husband and Jill had conceived. In a series of 21 flashbacks, Mrs. Chancellor recalls the night she saw her husband and Jill on the barn floor carressing and kissing each other.

The following are 11 typical examples of the 34 petting acts/references presented in the sample of 1979 programs:

(1) After swimming in the ocean, Brook tackles Mark on the beach. Lying on a towel, the two touch each other and embrace passionately.

(2) Edna is daydreaming about the conversation she had with Benji. They are discussing the possibility of little Dotti walking in on them. Regardless, Benji takes Edna and kisses her hard. End of dream.

(3) Jay and Carol are in the book store as he gives her a present. She wraps herself around him and they kiss.

(4) Dam suggests that he and Jill have a romantic French dinner. She says that she will put on something fantastic and leans over, takes his face, and gives him a long kiss.

(5) Raven has had too much to drink at the restaurant. Elliot, the maitre d', takes her to his private office where he leans her up against the wall for support. They end up in a passionate kiss.

(6) Having just awakened in bed together, Leslie and Rick discuss his desire to have children of his own. She notes how that is a promise she intends to keep as they kiss passionately.

(7) Immediately after the above act, the camera cuts to Monica and Allen, who are in a passionate embrace and kissing.

(8) Tracy and Mitch are in bed together. Tracy suggests that Mitch marry her, but Mitch will have none of it. Tracy notes that she eill have the last word -- a long, hard kiss.

(9) Ed must leave from his visit with Holly in the jail cell. They wrap their arms around each other and kiss passionately. They are ex-lovers.

(10) Tony has just proposed to Bambi, who accepts. They kiss, but it is clearly not a kiss of affection. They have been waiting for this opportunity for a long time and can wait no longer.

(11) Senacut and Julie are sitting on the couch. They both say how much they love each other. THey embrace and kiss. He says, "Can't dinner wait?" She nods as they embrace once more.

Intercourse between unmarried partners was found six times as often as intercourse between husband and wife in 1976 and four times as often in 1979, although for both years the occurrence of these behaviors was relatively low. No acts of, or reference to homosexuality occurred in either year. There were no instances of prostitution and only one instance of rape in 1979, while these behaviors occurred with greater frequency in 1976. Overall, there were more acts/references of sexual intimacy in 1979 than in 1976, but of the behaviors coded, the 1976 season had a greater diversity of sex acts/references while the acts/references in the 1979 programs were predominantly petting behaviors.

Table 3 presents show sample characteristics and the frequency of all intimate acts/references for soap operas in the 1976 and 1979 seasons. Based on 15.5 hours of television in 1976, 2.0 intimate acts or references occurred per hour. Of the 21 hours of television in 1979, 2.28 intimate acts or references occurred per hour. As was noted in the introduction of this report, two programs would have added an additional two hours to our sample and might have raised the average number of intimate acts or references for the 1976 season. Despite this oversight, the average number of acts or references of the two seasons were relatively equal.

In subsequent analyses, as a result of the large number of petting behaviors in both seasons of soap operas, all acts other than petting were summed and presented as a single subcategory "intercourse." In doing this, all acts that implied intercourse behaviors could be easily compared with

those acts of sexual intimacy that do not involve intercourse.

A comparative analysis of the three commercial networks was done across both years of our sampe programs. Those figures appear in Table 4. Clearly, the CBS soap operas had the highest rate of sexual intimacy with an average of 2.61 acts/references per hour. NBC and ABC programs were even with about 1.90 incidents of sexual intimacy per hour. Both CBS and ABC exhibited nearly twice as many incidents of petting than intercourse while NBC exhibited slightly more incidents of intercourse than petting. Of those acts of or references to intercourse on NBC, the most prevalent was prostitution. Prostitution did not appear on any of the other networks.

Table 5 presents the distribution of content analyzed by the length of the program. During the 30-minute programs 3.07 intimate sexual acts/references per hour were coded, as opposed to the 60-minute programs with a rate of 1.94 acts/references per hour. In other words, in an hour of programming, there were more incidents of sexual intimacy in two 30-minute programs than in one 60-minute program. Of the acts and references that occurred in these programs, there were slightly more petting behaviors in the 30-minute programs than the 60-minute programs, with the frequency of intercourse behaviors being relatively similar in both types of programming.

The results in Table 6 reflect the relative incidence of acts/references by the time of day in which they occurred. Programs before 1 p.m. had slightly more acts/references of both petting and intercourse than did the programs appearing after 1 p.m. Although there were more programs after 1 p.m. than before, those programs aired earlier in the day were all 30 minutes in length. As was noted in Table 5, those programs of a 30-minute duration depict more incidents of sexual intimacy per hour than do their 60-minute counterparts.

Table 7 presents the distribution of content analyzed by the level of physical and verbal explicitness. Of the 34 behaviors coded as intercourse, only one was presented as highly explicit in its physical portrayal while one other was highly explicit in its verbal portrayal. Intercourse behaviors, as portrayed on television soap operas, were mostly verbal references of low explicitness. Petting, on the other hand, was mostly a physical act of either high or low physical explicitness. There were very few verbal references accompanying the physical act. Of the 45 behaviors coded as petting, only 4 were of high verbal explicitness.

Finally, selected demographic characteristics of the participants in these sexual incidents were determined. Table 8 summarizes the results. Women were as likely as men to be participants in the performance of, or reference to, an act of sexual intimacy. Given the complete absence of homosexuality, it is not surprising to find roughly one man and one woman engaging in each intimate sexual act coded, although men outnumber women among all television characters by three to one. The distribution of participants by race was not tables, but indicated that 97 percent of all participants were white. Blacks constitute 10 percent of all the television characters, but only 3 percent of the targets and agents of these intimate sex acts/references in soap operas. No other ethnic groups participated. The distribution of participants by role was also not tabled, but indicated that 99 percent of all agents and targets were major, as opposed to minor, characters in that particular episode.

The concentration of intimate sex in the young adult and mid-adult years was also shown in Table 8. 62 percent of all agents and 68 percent of all targets were between the ages of 21 to 35, with an average of only 2 percent of all acts or references occurring among those under 21 years of age and

31 percent of all acts or references occurring among those 36 and older. There does not appear to be an age difference between those who participate in petting or intercourse behaviors.

Many occupations could not be identified from the coding of two episodes of each program. Of the occupations that were coded, there were predominantly more professionals and managerial positions identified than others. There was no clear difference between the occcupations held by the agent and target of intimate sex acts/references but of the acts that occurred, more professionals and managers engaged in petting than intercourse. Finally, 53 percent of the agents and 48 percent of the targets were married. There were more married than unmarried agents and targets in the behaviors coded as intercourse, despite the fact that there were more acts of intercourse between unmarried partners than married. The reason for this is that the behaviors coded as intercourse between unmarried partners were generally presented to the viewer as verbal references to intercourse between two unmarried others by a married agent and target.

Table 9 presents the distribution of content analyzed by the type of interaction between the agent and target of the act/reference. This table indicates that 97 percent of the behaviors coded as intercourse were simply discussed, while only one act of intercourse was solely a physical act. This act depicted a woman walking into a male friend's bedroom and finding the maid, naked, in the bed. Because this was not clearly an act of intercourse between unmarried partners, this behavior was coded as an "other" intimacy. Only 7 percent of the behaviors coded as petting were simply discussed, while 60 percent were comprised of both physical action and discussion and 33 percent were comprised of physical action only.

Table 10 presents the content analyzed by the type of relationship between those actually performing or referred to as having performed an

intimate act. This table indicates that, of those participants who engaged in a behavior coded as intercourse, only 6 percent of them were married. The vast majority of those participating in this type of sexual intimacy were unmarried with 49 percent coded as lovers and 29 percent coded as strangers. Of those engaging in behaviors coded as petting, 45 percent were lovers while 35 percent were married. Apparently then, according to this analysis, unmarried people were portrayed as being much more sexually active than married people. Of the intimate sexual behaviors that married people did perform, they were more likely to perform petting than talk about intercourse.

DISCUSSION

The portrayal of sexual intimacy on television's soap opera serials appears to have certain noteworthy characteristics. First, it has been demonstrated that these acts are not infrequent, occurring at a rate of two or more an hour. This rate of occurrence has remained rather constant between 1976 and 1979, with only a slight increase noted in the 1979 season. The most prevalent act of sexual intimacy was petting, which occurred predominantly among married people and with a greater frequency in 1979. Married people were more likely to discuss intercourse than perform it, while intercourse between unmarried partners was a popular subject. Sexual deviation was rarely visually presented in soap operas, although for the 1976 season, heterosexual tape and prostitution were occasionally referred to. There were no acts of homosexuality in either of the two sample seasons, nor were there any acts of prostitution in the 1979 sample. There was only one act of rape in that year's programs, which was portrayed with low verbal explicitness and no physical depiction.

A fairly common presentation of sexual intimacy in soap operas was in dream sequences and flashbacks. In 1976, 27 instances of petting resulted from two independent flashback sequences from different shows with an additional act of petting depicted in a dream. These flashbacks presented rapid-fire, repetitious, and highly explicit physical depictions of petting. There were no examples of this type of flashback sequence in 1979, although short flashbacks accounted for one act of petting and one "other" intimacy, dreams accounted for two acts of petting and one act of intercourse between married partners, and day dreams accounted for two acts of petting. To summarize, unmarried people were more likely to engage in intercourse than

married people, although married people did engage in talking about intercourse between unmarried others and dreaming about intercourse with their spouses. Overall, however, petting was the primary sexual activity between married people.

In comparing my results with the Fernandez-Collado, et al. (1978) content analysis of sexual intimacy on prime-time television, I found that for the 1976 season, continuing stories were less promiscuous during daytime programming than during prime-time hours. Using the same categories that comprise the intercourse behaviors coded in this analysis, Fernandez-Collado, et al. found approximately three acts of sexual intimacy an hour; nearly one act per hour more than what was found in the continuing stories of the late morning and afternoon. Of the behaviors coded, Fernandez-Collado, et al. found that intercourse between unmarried partners was the most prevalent sexual intimacy portrayed. Apparently, then, prime-time television is geared toward an older, more sophisticated audience by presenting more frequent and more intimate sexual behaviors.

Of all the acts of sexual intimacy portrayed on television's soap operas, only 14 percent were of high physical explicitness and only 6 percent were of high verbal explicitness. There were only two acts which were highly explicit in both its verbal and physical portrayal, both of which were petting. There were no acts of intercourse depicted as both highly physical and verbal in their explicitness. In summary, many of the sex acts on soap operas were not explicitly portrayed; they were discussed, alluded to or implied. Petting behaviors which are, by definition, physical acts were primarily portrayed with low physical and verbal explicitness.

Since the primary reason for this content analysis is the subsequent assessment of whether social learning occurs from the viewing of intimacy

on television, particularly among young children, one would anticipate that the less explicit the act or reference, the less likely the child would understand the intimacy. As is noted in the discussion section of Greenberg, et al. (1978), perhaps prior to or concurrent with any study of children's social learning about sexual intimacy from television, those children should be tested in terms of their cognitive understanding about the content of these acts. For example, shown a man and woman in bed together engaging in a verbal exchange about last night's sexual activities, what does the viewer think is happening or about to happen? Given a series of flashbacks depicting a young woman's visual remembrance of last year's rape, what does the young viewer think is happening? Was or is the woman being raped as many times as is portrayed in the rapid succession of flashbacks? The child's understanding of the intimate act and an appreciation for the creative way in which it is portrayed will certainly influence the level of impact on this type of content and should be examined.

Mischel's (1966) interpretation of social learning theory in the development of sex roles and imitation of sex behaviors states that children will come to value and model those sex behaviors which are performed by their own sex. Given the results of this study, the theory would predict that it is as acceptable for unmarried women to participate in sexual intimacy as it is for unmarried men. Mischel also states that the "manner in which the model's behavior is presented, with respect to the frequency, rate, and clarity of presentation critically affects the extent to which the modeled behaviors are acquired" (p. 59). For these dimensions of the portrayal of sexually intimate behaviors on soap operas, the theory would predict that of the behaviors imitated, petting

was the most explicitly portrayed and would be modeled with greater frequency and with more physical enactment than would any of the other acts of sexual intimacy.

A problem that may never be resolved and is inherent to all content analyses is, even when coders are reliable in the recording of acts, is that what is really going on? Two coders may agree on the coding of a particular behavior, but is it really that behavior or would an untrained observer identify that behavior as something different? This is actually a validity question and can only be answered through the replication of the content analysis and the study of young television viewer's in regard to their ability to identify the behaviors, participants, and the level of explicitness analyzed for this study.

While the results presented in this report are rather clear cut in many instances, they serve to generate more questions about the content of television programming. Although this report suggests that the rate of occurrence of sexual intimacy is somewhat constant from the 1976 to 1979 seasons, two episodes of each program from a one-week sample are not sufficient enough to fully support this finding. Since soap operas are continuing stories with no reruns or summer replacements, a one-week sample may not serve as the best predictor of the trends of sexual intimacy. There may be an unstable presentation of this type of behavior from week to week, possibly dependent on how that particular story might be developing or what the major theme of the story might be. For example, if the main characters have been in a car crash, are on the verge of death, and hospitalized for the next week's episodes, there is a very good chance that hospital scenes and not bedroom scenes will prevail. If only the wife is hospitalized and the husband and his ex-lover are anxiously awaiting the wife's passing,

there is a greater chance of a verbal reference of physical portrayal of some sexual intimacy.

From coding the sample of soap opera serials, there appears to be a trend of sexual activity in each program; a trend that is the result of four or five minor themes. These themes seem to make their appearance during each day's episode. Acts of passion and violence are often the basis for a soap opera's storyline, with each of these sub-themes somehow examining a seperate, yet related, aspect or character of that main storyline. In other words, each of these sub-themes share that act of aggression or sex in one or more capacities. The rate of occurrence of an intimate sexual behavior, as it is defined in this report, is dependent on just how involved that sub-theme is with the main storyline. For example, if a sub-theme focuses on how a young girl is handling her recent rape, that girl is a direct descendent of the main storyline and is very likely to engage in many verbal references to that rape. It is also possible that this young girl will have a day dream, nightmare, or flashback of the rape that will present a physically explicit portrayal of that rape. If another sub-theme focused on how the sister of this girl was ignorant of the rape and was leading a happy, innocent life as a student of criminal law, there will more than likely be few instances of intimate sexual behavior. Should two of the sub-themes collapse and share a common character, the likelihood of acts of or references to sexual behavior increase. For example, if the escaped rapist met and fell in love with the sister, the level of involvement with the main storyline increases as will the rate of occurrence of intimate sexual behavior.

Apparently, the collapsing of sub-themes serves to quicken the pace of the program. Petting behaviors serve the same function for they act as

stimulants during the slow points of a particularly uninvolved sub-theme. From coding the sample programs, it becomes clear that the greater the frequency of the petting behaviors, the less involved the sub-theme. This observation coincides with the finding that there were more petting behaviors in 1979 while there were more acts of rape, prostitution, and intercourse between unmarried partners in 1976. Apparently the abundance of petting indicates the absence of these other intimate sexual behaviors in the sub-themes, possibly the result of a storyline that may not be sex-related.

Clearly, a one-week sampling method should be supplemented by additional weeks so to follow the trends of sexual activity that appear to prevail in soap opera serials. A longitudinal analysis would also be able to pick up on these trends if they do, indeed, exist and would be a useful method in any subsequent content analysis in this area. A longitudinal study would also identify any additional variables which might contribute to the frequency or types of sexual intimacy that are presented in soap operas. Given the additional information provided by these studies, policy decisions might be made in reference to the portrayal of sexual intimacy on day time programming.

TABLE 1

SAMPLE SHOW CHARACTERISTICS

	Number of Episodes		Number of Hours	
	1976	1979	1976	1979
Networks				
ABC	6	10	3.5	8
NBC	8	6	6	6
CBS	10	10	6	7
Time Period				
Before 1 p.m.	6	6	3	3
1 p.m. and After	18	20	12.5	18
Program Length				
1/2 hour	16	12	8	6
3/4 hour	2	-	1.5	-
1 hour	6	12	6	12
1½ hour	-	2	-	3

TABLE 2

TYPES OF INTIMATE ACTS/REFERENCES BY YEAR[3]

	1976	1979
Acts:		
1. Rape/Homosexual and Heterosexual	4	1
2. Homosexuality	-	-
3. Prostitution	5	-
4. Intercourse/Unmarried Partners	6	4
5. Intercourse/Married Partners	1	1
6. Petting	11	34
7. Other Intimacies	4	8
Total Acts	31	48

$X^2=10.42$, df=1, $P \leq .01$

[3] The types of intimate acts/references were collapsed into "petting" and "intercourse" categories for the statistical analysis.

TABLE 3

SHOW SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS AND FREQUENCY OF
INTIMATE SEXUAL ACTS/REFERENCES

	1976	1979
1. Number of Different Soap Opera Serials	12	13
2. Number of Episodes	24	26
3. Number of Hours	15.5	21
4. Number of Intimate Acts/References	31	48
5. Intimate Acts/References Per Hour	2.0	2.28

TABLE 4

INTIMATE SEXUAL ACTS/REFERENCES BY NETWORK

	ABC	NBC	CBS
1. Number of Hours	11.5	12	13
2. Number of Petting Acts/References	14	10	21
3. Number of Intercourse Acts/References	8	13	13
4. Petting Per Hour	1.21	0.83	1.61
5. Intercourse Per Hour	0.69	1.08	1.0
Overall Rate	1.90	1.91	2.61

TABLE 5

INTIMATE SEXUAL ACTS/REFERENCES BY
LENGTH OF PROGRAM

	30 Minutes	60 Minutes
1. Number of Intimate Acts/References	43	35
2. Number of Episodes	28	18
3. Petting Per Hour	1.78	1.06
4. Intercourse Per Hour	1.29	0.88
Overall Rate	3.07	1.94

TABLE 6

INTIMATE SEXUAL ACTS/REFERENCES BY
TIME OF DAY

	Before 1 p.m.	1 p.m. and After
1. Number of Hours	6	30.5
2. Number of Petting Acts/References	9	36
3. Number of Intercourse Acts/References	7	27
4. Petting Per Hour	1.50	1.18
5. Intercourse Per Hour	1.10	0.88
Overall Rate	2.60	2.06

TABLE 7

LEVEL OF EXPLICITNESS BY TYPE OF ACT/REFERENCE

	PETTING	INTERCOURSE
Level of Explicitness:		
1. Physical Explicitness		
-high	10	1
-low	35	2
-none	-	31
		X^2=67.56, df=2, P $\leq$ .001
2. Verbal Explicitness		
-high	4	1
-low	26	32
-none	15	1
		X^2=7.97, df=2, P $\leq$ .05

TABLE 8

AGENT AND TARGET CHARACTERISTICS BY
TYPE OF ACT/REFERENCE

Agent:	PETTING	INTERCOURSE
1. Sex		
-Female	17	20
-Male	28	14
		X^2=3.46, df=1, P=n.s.
2. Age		
-under 21	1	-
-21 to 35	28	21
-36 to 45	10	6
-over 45	4	7
		X^2=2.80, df=3, P=n.s.
3. Occupation		
-Professional & Managerial	19	13
-Other	15	17
-Don't Know	11	4
		X^2=3.09, df=2, P=n.s.
4. Marital Status		
-Single	17	9
-Married	24	18
		X^2=0.45, df=1, P=n.s.

Target:	PETTING	INTERCOURSE
1. Sex		
-Female	29	17
-Male	16	17
		X^2=1.67, df=1, P=n.s.
2. Age		
-under 21	1	1
-21 to 35	34	20
-36 to 45	10	8
-over 45	-	3
		X^2=4.78, df=3, P=n.s.
3. Occupation		
-Professional & Managerial	24	14
-Other	14	14
-Don't Know	7	6
		X^2=1.26, df=2, P=n.s.
4. Marital Status		
-Single	19	13
-Married	24	14
		X^2=0.11, df=1, P=n.s.

TABLE 9

TYPE OF INTERACTION BETWEEN
AGENT AND TARGET

	PETTING	INTERCOURSE
Type of Interaction:		
1. Physical Only	15	1
2. Discussion Only	3	33
3. Physical and Discussion	27	-

$X^2=63.98$, df=2, $P \leq .001$

TABLE 10

TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THOSE PERFORMING OR REFERRED TO AS PERFORMING AN INTIMATE ACT[4]

	PETTING	INTERCOURSE
Relationship:		
1. Engaged/Plan to Marry	2	1
2. Married	17	2
3. Work Together	5	5
4. Strangers	3	10
5. Lovers	22	17

$X^2=14.66$, df=4, $P \leq .01$

[4]Since these categories are not mutually exclusive, each relationship was coded using one or more of these categories and comprise the frequencies appearing in this table. Of the persons performing or referred to as performing petting behaviors, two relationships were coded as "lovers" and "work together," one was coded as "engaged" and "work together," and one was coded as "married" and "work together." Of the persons performing or referred to as performing intercourse behaviors one relationship was coded as "lovers" and "work together."

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